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Britain and Ireland - 1834**

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AN

AFFECTIONATE ADDRESS

TO THE

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

IN

GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

BY A MEMBER.

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To become a fool in order to be wise is no small attainment: yet it is one essentially needful for every true Christian. His experience teaches him that he must be willing to be reputed such, for the sake of Him who hath loved us, and shed his precious blood for us;—for the sake of Him in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and who dispenseth them to his children severally as he will; enduing them with patience to possess their souls, when a scarcity of spiritual food, or even a seeming entire deprivation of it is experienced. But whether they want or whether they abound, there is equal need to attend to the injunction, “What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch;” lest the enemy should prevail on them to take up a rest short of the true rest, to substitute head-knowledge for heart-knowledge; or, which is the same, darkness for light; and this darkness the more impenetrable, because it is mistaken for light. “If,” said our blessed Lord, “the light within thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.”

The writer, who feels that he is one of the weakest of

the flock, is induced to make these remarks, from a sincere desire that himself and every individual member of the body may keep in mind, that those who do the will of our Lord are they that shall know of his doctrine; and that those who abide with Him in his temptations, are they to whom the kingdom is appointed. Blessed results of simple child-like obedience ! the which, may none who have tasted of his goodness miss of obtaining, through trusting in man, and making flesh their arm ; and thus becoming like the heath in the desert that seeth not when good cometh ; but may our individual experience attest, that “ Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is ; for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river ; and shall not see when heat cometh ; but her leaf shall be green : and shall not be careful in the year of drought ; neither shall cease from yielding fruit.” In this state of greenness, the humble conviction is sealed, that “ the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” “ Who,” saith the prophet, “ can know it ?” and, under a deep sense of our helplessness without a Saviour, often will earnest prayer for deliverance from its corruptions, ascend as incense to the throne of Him who hath declared, “ I the Lord search the heart ; I try the reins.”

If ever there were a day when deep travail for the welfare of our Zion was called for from her mourners, this appears to be eminently such a day ; for have we not, in great measure as a body, left our first love ? and is there not reason to fear that a day of deep proving may be hastening upon us ; a day that shall be “ darkness and not light ; even very dark, and no brightness in it ?” Well, dear friends, who amongst us shall stand when the anger of the Lord is poured out, and the rocks

are thrown down by Him? surely those only who can say, "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble:" for to such it is given to believe, that "he knoweth them that trust in him." It is my earnest desire that all within our borders may be induced to ponder this subject: to try themselves in the balance of the sanctuary, whether they be in the faith; and whether, through its precious influence, they are receiving supplies of wisdom and knowledge from the great fountain-head, Jesus Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God; or whether they are confiding in their natural powers, or in past experiences, or openings treasured up in the natural understanding: thus hewing out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no living water. Oh! that none may endeavour to open the book of heavenly wisdom by means of any key, except the key of David; with which, in his own time, our blessed Redeemer will assuredly furnish us, if under and through all the baptizing operations of his holy hand we shall have faithfully maintained the watch. To this key of David, I feel a concern to invite the attention of my fellow-professors in this day of outward ease: earnestly desiring that He who hath this key, "He that shutteth and no man openeth, and openeth and no man shutteth," may be graciously pleased to give us to see that our whole dependance must be upon Him thus revealed; and that without this key no access can be had to the riches of his house, no not for an hour, whatever our past experience may have been. The inspired description of the state of one of the seven churches may afford a salutary warning in this respect. It would seem that in her own apprehension she abounded in the fruits of the Spirit:—she had borne, and had patience: and for Christ's sake had laboured; and had not fainted:—

she had even tried them who said they were apostles, but were not ; and had found them liars : and yet her condition was pronounced by Him whose eyes are "as a flame of fire," to be so fallen, that, unless she repented, her candlestick would be quickly removed out of his place.

In another land, lamentably has the enemy of all good succeeded in beguiling many unstable professors with us into a reliance on their reasoning powers, and a consequent adoption of doctrines utterly at variance with our religious profession : doctrines which are the bitter fruit of that wisdom which is from beneath. There is cause for much thankfulness that a barrier has hitherto been generally opposed to the introduction of these doctrines among friends in this land : but is there not danger, that unless we are preserved in abiding watchfulness and deep humility, our "loins girded about, and our lights burning," we may, while zealously opposing one error, be entangled in another ? In endeavouring to uphold even right principles, there is reason to fear that if we neglect to stand upon our watch, and to set us upon the tower, we shall *ourselves* be beguiled into a dependance on the form instead of the power : and if in this way, the subtle enemy can but draw us from the pure life, his purpose is as effectually answered as if he had betrayed us into open apostacy.

In days that are past, the Scripture declaration, that Israel should "dwell alone," was often quoted as applicable to our society. A similar application of it in *this* day, will probably induce considerable censure : nevertheless I freely own it to be my conviction, that it always has been and still is, an appropriate adaptation. It was when Israel was abiding in his tents, separate from the surrounding nations, that the emphatic excla-

mation was uttered, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob! and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth; as gardens by the river's side; as the trees of lign-aloes, which the Lord hath planted; and as cedar-trees beside the waters." And of this favoured people, it was declared on the same occasion, "Israel shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." It may, by many, be deemed presumptuous, to attempt to assign, for our society, a similar position in regard to other religious bodies: but when duly considered, will it not be seen that there is an accordance in the two cases? It is true, we are not an *exclusive* people; but were we not called out of the world, to be a *special* people? Peculiar testimonies are committed to our charge: and, above all, we specially profess to have our dependance for counsel, under all circumstances and in all emergencies, on the divine principle of light and life inwardly revealed; and to wait oftener than the day, in the silence of all flesh, for its holy illuminations and leadings: and although, in the view of some, it may savour of sectarianism, to suppose that there is danger for the young and inexperienced, indeed for any of us, to associate so intimately as we do, with such as see not eye to eye with us in this respect, as well as in respect to our subordinate characteristic testimonies; there seems to be too much reason for apprehending, that such association has often proved a snare to many of our members; and that it is a cunning device of the enemy to draw them away from the simplicity of the truth, and from implicit submission to the teachings of Christ's Spirit within them. Thus, under the specious pretext of liberality, or perhaps even of usefulness, a relaxation in the support of testimonies, for which our worthy ancestors were made

willing to suffer the loss of all, has followed in various ways. Is it not sorrowful to observe, that divers, if not nearly all of those precious testimonies, are now, by many amongst us, evaded, if not wholly relinquished? Is not the plain language in addressing an individual too often avoided? And when speaking to or of individuals or companies, are not terms customary with the world, and sometimes scarcely consistent with truth, adopted as substitutes for proper names, or for other correct appellations; because these latter might sound uncouthly to those who do not scruple to receive honour one of another? among which terms may be noted, as pre-eminently inconsistent with our profession, titles indicative of what are called degrees in divinity. Again, how great is the present deviation from plainness of apparel; also in regard to hat-honour, and the adoption of names of days and months derived from heathen idolatry; and the designation of quarter-days from popish mass-days:—in prefixing the term “Saint” to names of places or parishes; and in calling a building appropriated to public worship, a church:—all so pointedly testified against by our ancestors in the beginning: to which may be added, the attendance by some of missionary meetings; and occasionally, even of assemblies for worship, in which forms and ceremonies are introduced, against which, also, our faithful predecessors, in the authority of truth testified, and from which they laboured earnestly to draw off the people. In *this* day, the testimonies committed to *our* charge are the same. Yet, far be it from me to pass censure upon my Christian brethren of other denominations. I believe that there are among them, many sincere in heart, according to the degree of light they have received: but if we would point out to them that which they have not yet

attained, we must not lower the standard entrusted to us as a people to lift up to the nations ; on which is inscribed the essential spirituality of the Gospel-dispensation, which leads from types and shadows and lifeless forms, to that worship of the Father in spirit and in truth, in which God, through the revelation of his Son Jesus Christ, is pre-eminently the teacher of his people Himself. If it should be suggested that the foregoing are little things, I would remark, that nothing is little which the Great Head of the Church condescends to reveal or command : nor can it well be doubted, that while weakness prevails in what we are apt to consider as little, dwarfishness, at least, will ensue in the greater ; seeing that the declaration of our blessed Lord himself was, “ He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much : and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much.” The example recorded of Saul is awful. He ventured to compromise the Divine command, performing only what he judged to be the material part, and omitting what he deemed comparatively immaterial : but his unfaithfulness cost him the kingdom.

To what source can we trace the above-named, and every other of our deviations from ancient simplicity ? the casting off, by so many, of badges which heretofore designated us a self-denying people, not conformed to this present world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds from its customs and maxims ? Must it not be answered,—To a departure from the power of the cross ? If any depart from this power, they assuredly depart from the wisdom also ; seeing that in the cross the power and the wisdom are united, agreeably to scripture testimony. If then we lose the wisdom and lose the power, the life of our religion is lost also : the no-

tion gets up in place of the reality : and though some leaves of the tree may retain an apparent greenness for a time, a canker is begun in the roots, because they no longer go down to the waters of life, from which alone substantial nourishment can be derived.

Are further symptoms needed of degeneracy amongst us? They are, I apprehend, to be discovered in habitual non-attendance of our week-day meetings ; in hurtful discussions, now prevalent, of doctrinal points ; in criticisms, now too common, on the ministry, and ministers ; in acute investigations regarding those lamentable divisions already adverted to, that have shaken our society to its centre in a foreign land ; divisions which originated in the unhallowed exertion of the natural understanding ; incompetent as it is, and ever will be, to comprehend mysteries revealed to the "babes" and the "sucklings," whose dependance is on the sincere milk of that word from which, only, the illumination which subjects and purifies the natural part, is derived. Another symptom that has often affected me with sorrow, is evident, as I apprehend, in the character of many, if not the generality of our meetings for discipline. These meetings, it will, I expect, be admitted, were established under the immediate guidance of best wisdom : if we do admit this, must it not be also necessarily admitted, that their important deliberations cannot be profitably conducted except under the influence of a measure of the same heavenly wisdom? and, if so, does it not equally follow, that those only who evince a living concern on their own account, and for the spiritual welfare of the society at large ; and who, among other indications, manifest that concern, by a faithful support of our various testimonies, and a regular attendance of meetings for worship on week-days as well as

on first-days, can be rightly qualified to take an active part in those deliberations, or to fill important offices in those meetings, or in the church by their delegation ?

Another thing, materially tending, in my apprehension, to our spiritual hurt, is the taking part with the world in contentions regarding public matters, whether ecclesiastical or civil ; unfavourable as they are to the quietude essential to the growth of the immortal seed. Our blessed Lord said of his disciples, that they were not of this world : neither so are his devoted followers now ; for they are still chosen by him *out of* the world.

In reviewing the state of our beloved youth in particular, is there not cause for the inquiry, does the dew of Hermon descend upon them as in former days ? Can we say of so many of our sons as formerly, that they are as plants grown up in their youth ; or of so many of our daughters, that they are as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace ? Doubtless there are numerous instances, where this is preciousely the case : but must it not be admitted, that our young people are, as naturally might be expected, partakers too generally of the defection that has crept in amongst us, similar to that described in ancient prophecy ; “ Ephraim he hath mixed himself among the people ; Ephraim is a cake not turned : strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not ? ” a language, which, if it be at all descriptive of the state of our society, may profitably tend to arouse us to the consideration, whether there is not danger for the unity of the body, the bond of its peace and prosperity ; without which the righteousness of our Zion cannot go forth as brightness, nor her salvation as a lamp that burneth,

In concluding these remarks, originating I trust in Christian affection for the welfare of my brethren and

sisters in religious profession, I have to express an earnest solicitude, that the spiritual eye in all of us may be enlightened to see how we stand, collectively and individually, in the sight of Him who hath not failed in blessing us ever since we were a people ; and who now, as ever, preserves his little ones as under the hollow of his almighty hand. May he be graciously pleased to raise in our souls the reverent and earnest enquiry, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" so that through the abounding of his mercy, we may yet be a people to his praise ; and the lamentation of the prophet never become applicable to our situation, "How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger !"

9th Month, 1834.







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